

Comments to:
Wildland Fire Leadership Council
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Denver, Colorado

By:
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On behalf of the:
American Forest Resource Council and
American Forest & Paper Association

I would like to thank the members of the Wildland Fire Leadership Council and the Western Governors' Association for this opportunity to present comments today. These comments are on behalf of the American Forest Resource Council (AFRC) and the American Forest & Paper Association (AF&PA).

As a representative of the forest products industry, I actively participated in the development of the 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy: A Collaborative Approach for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment and its subsequent implementation plan.

But now the real work begins. The challenge before us is how to make the rubber hit the road and actually make progress. The AFRC and AF&PA welcome the opportunity to continue participating in this important effort as an interested stakeholder. In particular, we are most interested in working on the specific tasks identified as Goal 2 Tasks E and F, and Goal 3 Task C. This does not mean the other tasks are any less important but these three reflect the greatest areas of interest for member companies.

It's important to remind ourselves and the public that this effort is not about cutting trees. Instead it's about addressing forest health issues and the risk of catastrophic wildfires. Dale Bosworth best described this as, and I'm paraphrasing, we should be discussing what's left in the forest rather than what's removed. I work quite closely with federal and state agencies, Tribal representatives, environmental groups, and the public in designing and implementing restoration and other types of projects on the ground. I'm confident to say that most times all parties agree on the objectives—it's the how-to that we have disagreement on. That is we get hung up on what's being removed rather than what's being left.

It's important that we get beyond this problem through an open, transparent public participation process. I strongly encourage the Wildland Fire Leadership Council to involve the public in meaningful ways recognizing, however, that this is difficult given the national scope of the Council's focus. Nevertheless, if the public is not part of the process, building trust and support becomes more difficult.

The forest health and wildfire issues are not limited to the West. Though these issues manifest themselves in various ways across the country, they nevertheless are real all

across the country and for all ownerships. Thus it's important that national interests such as the forest products industry, the National Association of State Foresters, and others become, or continue to be, actively engaged in finding solutions and implementing them on the ground.

There are numerous examples of the urgent need to implement the 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy Implementation Plan. I'd like to briefly share two of them to illustrate.

The Cone Fire started on September 26, 2002 near the Blacks Mountain Experimental Forest on the Lassen National Forest and burned over most of the 2,000 acres damaged within 2 days. Fuel moisture conditions in the flashy fuels were between 2-6% and relative humidity was less than 15 percent when the fire occurred. Fortunately, wind speeds were relatively mild. Because of the dry conditions, once the initial fire started it quickly became a crown fire killing everything in its path until it reached some research plots established on the Blacks Mountain Experimental Forest in the 1990's. Forest Service Researchers had established 250-acre research plots on 12 locations throughout the 11,000-acre forest. These research plots were designed to determine the ecological, economic, and management responses to two different forest thinning treatments, prescribed fire and grazing. When the raging fire reached the first of these plots, the catastrophic crown fire became a controllable ground fire. Mortality outside of the thinned research areas was total. Within the research plots, mortality was approximately 5% of the trees remaining on the thinned plots according to inventories released by the Redding Silviculture Laboratory scientists responsible for the Blacks Mountain Research Forest. The bulk of the mortality on the thinned plots occurred on the edges from the radiant energy of the crown fire in the unthinned areas. One of the interesting sidelights is that the fire control efforts actually used the edges of one of the research plots as a location for the fire line to control the fire. There is no question that the thinned research plots dramatically reduced the catastrophic effects of this wildfire.

The other case, which is certainly not unique but one I'm familiar with, exemplifies the need to address the process gridlock issue. In Central Oregon, the Deschutes National Forest issued its Decision Notice for the McCahee Vegetation Management Project on October 19, 2001. According to that document, over 1/3 of the forest stands in the area have moderate to very high mortality. Consequently the project objectives included reducing the risk of losing important habitat for plants and animals and to restore forest health. In addition, reducing fuels in order to lower the risk to people (local residents, visitors, and fire-fighters) from severe wildfire was also an objective. According to the Forest Service, a fire in the Cache Mountain area where this project was intended, would pose a potential threat to the Suttle Lake recreation complex 1-2 miles north, Black Butte Resort (about 1300 homes) four miles east, Weyerhaeuser land and timber directly east, bald eagle and spotted owl habitat near Suttle Lake, and the historic Santiam Wagon Road. Unfortunately, the McCahee project has not been implemented yet due to appeals. Indeed, one appeal claimed, "The goal(s) of reducing risk for firefighters and the public are inappropriate", and "The McCahee area is not very populated and you can't realistically change fire behavior enough to make a difference for the firefighters." Even

more unfortunate is that the dire predictions came true this past fire season. On July 23 a lightening strike ignited a fire that within five days grew to nearly 4,000 acres, destroyed private forest land, two homes at Black Butte Ranch, and led to the evacuation of a youth church camp and other recreational users. Now I am not going to say the McCache project absolutely would have prevented this but the chances are good that had the project been implemented, the fuel modifications would have allowed fire fighters to get control of the fire sooner with less damage to resources and private property.

In closing, I again thank the Council and Western Governors' Association for their efforts in addressing this national problem. Despite the polarizing rhetoric following this summer's historic fire season, the 10-year comprehensive strategy and implementation plan is still the basis for the President's Healthy Forests Initiative as well as all attempts at bipartisan compromise language most recently evidenced by the efforts of Representatives McInnis, Walden, DeFazio, and Miller in the House Resources Committee.

AFRC, AF&PA, and others in the industry have participated, collaborated, and compromised in developing this strategy and plan. We are now committed to seeing it fully implemented and are willing to be partners in any way we can.